



**ourMidland.com**

from the Midland Daily News

05/05/2006

## MidMichigan gearing for growing health profession

Cheryl Wade, Midland Daily News

East Central

LPR-RSA

03-050506-01

Thirty years ago, patients went under the knife for cataract surgery and had to spend three or four days on their backs to get the healing process under way. In the future, doctors will seek out the proteins that cause cataracts so the eye problem never happens in the first place.

This illustration, given at a community health care summit Thursday in Saginaw, is evidence that health care is becoming more complex. It's also becoming more in demand and will require growing numbers of professionals to care for an ever-aging population.

Michigan spent \$26.3 billion on health care in 2004, and the health care industry grew when other sectors of the economy shrank in recent years, said state labor market analyst Jason Palmer. Between 1990 and 2004, the health care and social assistance industry grew 33 percent, compared to 10.4 percent for average job growth. The health care industry will generate one in four jobs from 2000-2012 in the region that includes the Tri-Counties, the Thumb and counties to the north.

It stands to reason the region's hospitals will need more and more workers in the coming years.

MidMichigan Medical Center is working to meet the challenge with a program called Grow Our Own, supporting current employees and others who want to train for medical jobs that are hard to fill.

Young people often want to move out of state in such an open market, preferring to move into a new area and then look for a job, said Joan Herbert, the hospital's director of oncology. MidMichigan wants more of those people to stay here.

A person seeking financial and other help meets with a coordinator to determine his/her interest level and need. While receiving an education, the applicant works part time in the field of interest and receives tutoring if needed. Thanks to donors, MidMichigan offers scholarships and forgivable loans and a tuition reimbursement program.

"There's always going to be turnover but we do all we can to retain quality employees," Herbert added.

For those who study health care, Saginaw Valley State University has a simulator that looks like a man and can be programmed to have medical problems the student must deal with. "Sim Man" cost \$50,000 when he was purchased a year ago, and SVSU "created a lab around him," said Janalou Blecke, dean of the College of Nursing and Health Science. Sim Man's warranty is \$6,000 a year and SVSU has to update his programs periodically. Those costs, plus the necessarily small classes in the lab, make this kind of training expensive, she said.

Future health care workers will be part of an increasingly technical industry, said Robert MacKenzie, director of planning for St. Mary's of Michigan.

"The watchword today is acceleration," he said. Modern brain scans can take less than a second and, in five heartbeats, sophisticated equipment can check all the heart's vessels, he said. The medical world now has artificial discs to replace real ones. Detroit Medical Center is experimenting with a robot that moves from room to room collecting data from patient monitors. In the future, doctors will use devices that function as cell phones, pagers and patient locators all at once.

There's even an answer for the claustrophobic person who needs an MRI – the walk-in kind.

"You can walk in and can have a loved one sit next to you," he said.

[ourMidlandforums.com](http://www.ourmidlandforums.com)

©Midland Daily News 2006